

VZCZCXRO0015
PP RUEHDBU RUEHLN RUEHPOD RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHMO #1836/01 1981054
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 171054Z JUL 09
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4282
INFO RUEHDX/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 5339

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 MOSCOW 001836

DEPARTMENT FOR PRM/ECA, PRM/MCE AND EUR/RUS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREF](#) [SOCI](#) [PHUM](#) [KWMN](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: RUSSIA: COMPETING PRIORITIES, POOR FUNDING INHIBIT
PROTECTION OF DISPLACED WOMEN

REFS: (A) MOSCOW 1647, (B) MOSCOW 1653, (C) STATE 49661

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Refugee and IDP women in Russia face even greater hurdles to equality than their sisters in the native and local population (refs A and B). Frequently they come from cultures in which women are subordinate to men, and populations in exile appear inclined to cling to outmoded gender roles as a vestige of stability. International organizations are underfunded and short on ideas to close the divide. This is the third in a series of cables examining the lives and prospects of women in Russia; it also responds to the PRM monitoring request in ref C. End Summary.

Reluctant Recruits to Russian Routines

¶2. (SBU) Natives of Afghanistan make up about 90 percent of refugees in Russia. The community is difficult to help with assimilation into Russian society, UNHCR Russia Country Representative Gesche Karrenbrock observed June 11, because members have an expectation of third-country resettlement born from years of near-certain rejection by Russian asylum authorities. With UNHCR technical assistance and training, the Russian Federal Migration Service (FMS) has substantially improved its refugee status determination (RSD) procedure this decade. In recognition of FMS's progress, UNHCR ceased providing parallel RSD in 2008; however, it still faces the problem of ensuring that successful asylum seekers in Russia achieve social integration and find livelihoods. The first order of business, Karrenbrock believes, is to convince the GOR to put its own social funding into the asylum system. But aid recipients are still likely to resist integration in Russia as long as they believe resettlement to Western Europe or the U.S. is a realistic option.

¶3. (U) Another challenge for UNHCR protection officers is to determine who the true Afghan community representatives are, as this is an urban population that is geographically and generationally (based on which Afghan regime they were forced to flee) divided. Karrenbrock was not familiar with UNHCR's new Heightened Risk Identification Tool (ref C). Traditional participatory assessments have shown that a great majority of families want cash assistance, an intervention that Karrenbrock rejects because it creates dependency. UNHCR targets cash assistance with a focus on creating livelihoods and the understanding of recipients that it is for a limited time; eventually it hopes to eliminate cash assistance completely.

¶4. (U) Much more sustainable, Karrenbrock asserted, are refugee women's gatherings to practice traditional crafts, such as embroidery, and discuss common challenges, such as domestic violence and spousal unemployment. A UNHCR local partner, Equilibre-Solidarity, provides space for such groups to meet but, to save money, has eliminated staff to supervise the meetings. Karrenbrock remains frustrated that, although the groups help the women to escape the social isolation imposed by traditional Afghan gender roles that confine women to the home, they do not actively assist with integration into the larger society. Her staff has scheduled the first meeting of a stakeholders working group on

women, children, and gender issues for August 13, 2009. (Note: This initiative grew out of a shelter working group that developed with Embassy Moscow support after Refcoord invited UNHCR and NGO representatives to a DVC on homelessness May 14. End note.)

UNHCR Moscow Approach to SGBV

15. (SBU) Russia's FMS does not recognize sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) as a ground for refugee status. It does, however, according to Karrenbrock, try to find another humanitarian basis on which to afford temporary asylum for women who make credible SGBV claims. As part of its government capacity building, UNHCR is instructing FMS that women can be construed as a social group under the 1951 Refugee Convention. Unfortunately, FMS interview facilities are not appropriate for passing confidential information.

In Moscow, up to four individuals are seen at one time in a room without partitions, creating potential embarrassment for women with sensitive stories to tell; facilities in St. Petersburg are slightly better. FMS has asked UNHCR to fund partitions, but Karrenbrock is wary of the precedent of backstopping the GOR on something so basic.

Instead, she proposes that UNHCR support FMS in the next round of intra-GOR funding negotiations.

16. (U) At UNHCR Moscow's Refugee Reception Center, a local-hire Social Protection Coordinator (SPC) manages the organization's psycho-social response to SGBV. UNHCR implementing partners and staff inform the SPC about suspected cases, and the SPC holds reception hours for women at risk. Women at risk also receive the SPC's mobile telephone number, which effectively serves as an SGBV hotline, making counseling available day and night. The SPC advises on the development of a personal security plan and measures to take

MOSCOW 00001836 002 OF 004

in case of violence; she also records traces of physical violence. SGBV cases are recorded on purpose-made forms that are collected by UNHCR's Protection Unit for statistical reporting purposes. The SPC also ensures that victims receive medical, psychosocial, and legal help - including, where appropriate, cash assistance and referral for resettlement. In emergencies, she identifies possibilities for temporary accommodation for victims of violence who cannot safely remain in their homes.

17. (SBU) According to an internal UNHCR Moscow document obtained by Refcoord, the SGBV response mechanism generally runs smoothly; however, the same constraints apply here as with other refugee protection in Russia. Many women do not have any identification documents, so they are reluctant to make reports to the police; Russian law enforcement are insufficiently trained in SGBV response; and refugee women lack the means to live separately from their abusers. Offenders are neither prosecuted nor punished, and Moscow has no shelters for foreign women-SGBV victims.

18. (SBU) UNHCR Moscow does have an established complaints and investigations procedure related to exploitation and abuse, but Karrenbrock acknowledges that the mechanism is not well publicized. The Reception Center furnishes a complaint box, but it has not been clear to clients whether complaints are confidential - although in fact no one below the Center's director, a member of international staff, is able to access its contents. Karrenbrock says there have been no complaints of staff harassment of Center clients but one complaint of corruption that bore investigation. The allegation was never proven and in fact may have been a case of attempted FSB (Russian security service) entrapment of an honest employee. The case did prompt a revision of the Center's standard operating procedures: reception duties are now rotated so that no employee can alone determine what benefits a client receives.

Some Statistics

19. (U) UNHCR reports that as of 2007 it had a total of 38 (36 women and two men) SGBV cases registered. Of those, 32 cases remained active throughout the year and received support. A total of six new cases were brought to the agency's attention during the year. In 2008 there were a total of 43 cases (42 women, one man), of which 33

received support. These included six cases of SGBV in the country of origin and 27 cases of SGBV in the country of asylum. In St. Petersburg, UNHCR registered four SGBV cases relating to minors. A total of 14 new SGBV cases were brought to UNHCR's attention.

¶10. (U) In 2007-8, UNHCR resettled in third countries a total of eight families (seven from Afghanistan and one from Iraq) as SGBV victims; two families from Afghanistan were repatriated for the same reason. In 2009 UNHCR has registered four new cases of violence against three women and one man in Moscow; and 15 women registered earlier have consulted on new cases of domestic violence or requested psychological, medical, or cash assistance.

Prisoners of the Mountains

¶11. (U) In addition to a lack of adequate shelter, which is their main problem, women IDPs in the North Caucasus face similar problems to women in the host community, according to UNHCR Vladikavkaz Senior Protection Officer Jun Shirato. This has made it difficult to develop particular programs for them, Shirato asserted - UNHCR cannot alter an entire society's culture, even as it recognizes that traditional practices such as bride abductions may further traumatize and disadvantage IDP women.

¶12. (SBU) Because of the prevalence of "adat," the pre-Islamic informal customary law, in the North Caucasus, most marriages, divorces, custody, property disputes, and other family and civil law matters that affect the lives of women are not administered by government agencies or the courts in accordance with Russian Law. In an expert affidavit solicited by Refcood in connection with a May 2009 in-country admissions referral, the affiant testified, "The Russian government has largely abandoned its citizens in Chechnya, especially vulnerable ones like women, to the arbitrariness of the [President Ramzan] Kadyrov government and abuses committed under adat. There has been no pro-active effort to make the protections of Russian law available to residents of Chechnya. Even when Chechen women defy adat and seek the protection of Russian law and assistance of the authorities, for example in custody cases (where adat holds that children 'belong' to the father's family and may be taken away permanently from their mothers), the authorities and courts are often unwilling to do their job and even counsel women to submit to local traditions instead."

¶13. (U) UNHCR uses its limited resources to focus on assisting IDP women with problems related specifically to their displacement. In

MOSCOW 00001836 003 OF 004

collective accommodations it is the women who are the most active in bringing their concerns to UNHCR protection staff, Country Director Karrenbrock told us. Their confidence in announcing their needs developed in 2000, when most men were off fighting - and frequently dying, leaving the women to head their households alone. After long experience of displacement, women in the North Caucasus have become articulate, if not organized, in their expressions of frustration with poor socio-economic conditions.

¶14. (U) Shirato noted that 40 percent of IDP families in the North Caucasus are headed by women. UNHCR does not register IDPs in the North Caucasus, though, so it obtains its data from studies undertaken by domestic and international NGO implementing partners. As UNHCR's North Caucasus budget does not permit it to offer assistance to all IDPs there, national authorities would look askance at any registration effort. Also, as the IDPs are scattered in both urban and rural settings across a wide region, some in collective centers and some in the private sector, UNHCR has not established an IDP committee, making it difficult to evaluate whether IDP women enjoy equal leadership opportunities in their communities. UNHCR provides assistance to the most vulnerable families, getting involved in about 100 cases a year based on information provided by monitors who visit IDP homes. Any assistance to families includes women's sanitary supplies, Shirato affirmed.

UNHCR Vladikavkaz Approach to SGBV

¶15. (U) In the fall of 2007 UNHCR Vladikavkaz developed and approved an SOP for responding to SGBV. The document's focus is on legal assistance, which the office believes is its strong suit. The office defines its primary role as helping people who want to take legal action against perpetrators. UNHCR leaves it to its implementing partners to offer, or make referrals for, medical and psycho-social care. No specific NGOs are mentioned in the SOP, however, due to high turnover among voluntary organizations active in the region.

Cultural and Security Impediments

¶16. (SBU) Country Director Karrenbrock elaborated on the context in which UNHCR is attempting to help North Caucasus IDP women. People there do not have faith in government structures, and are afraid that there could even be retaliation for reporting certain crimes. But UNHCR is loath to criticize sexist officials (note: such as Chechnya's Human Rights Ombudsman, who last winter suggested that several female murder victims had brought their fates on themselves by wearing provocative clothing; end note) publicly for fear of alienating individuals who are essential to resolving other IDP issues.

¶17. (U) Also, due to the tense security environment, UN international staff can only travel to IDP areas in large armed convoys that in effect deter approaches by individuals seeking help with sensitive issues. UNHCR therefore works through domestic partners such as NIZAM and Vesta, whose trained social workers can move discreetly among their vulnerable countrywomen. Even so, it takes either a very courageous woman to go on to pursue legal remedies for her victimization or else creation of so much publicity around a case that retaliation becomes too risky for allies of the perpetrator to contemplate, Karrenbrock observed.

¶18. (U) International Medical Corps (IMC) Country Director Simon Rasin corroborated Karrenbrock's observations in a conversation with Refcoord June 6. The North Caucasus is a difficult environment in which to get women even to talk about sexual violence, Rasin stated, because of a widespread attitude that SGBV should not be discussed outside the home but dealt with inside the affected clan or family. Teachers at schools where IMC conducts training often say that SGBV is a major problem elsewhere but not in their local communities; Rasin posits that this is because the teachers do not wish to discuss the problem with outsiders. When IMC makes an income generation grant to an SGBV victim, it is at pains to keep secret from often equally economically vulnerable community members the reason for the individual's selection. Publicizing the truth could result in the victim being ostracized by her family and neighbors, Rasin reported, though younger, better educated Chechens, especially those who have been abroad, tend to have more accepting attitudes. IMC has worked closely with UNHCR protection staff, including Shirato and a Chechen attorney who is a former policeman, on providing SGBV training to Chechen police officers. The UNHCR speakers lecture on international and domestic legal standards as they apply to SGBV cases the officers may see in their work.

¶19. (U) Presumably because of its narrow legal focus, UNHCR Vladikavkaz only directly dealt with two cases of SGBV in 2008, both

MOSCOW 00001836 004 OF 004

involving rapes of young children - one by a stranger, and one by a neighbor. UNHCR counseled the families. In the stranger rape case, the family proceeded with a criminal prosecution, but in the other case the victim's family quietly departed the community where the crime had taken place.

¶20. (SBU) Caucasians do not want to come to UNHCR about SGBV issues, Shirato concluded resignedly, and UNHCR cannot compel them, though it does disseminate information about its legal services. Her office has not been able to figure out a way to be more effective in this sphere, Shirato lamented. Karrenbrock also conceded that, for all the good work of its national partners, UNHCR itself needs to do more creative thinking about how it can help.

¶21. (U) UNICEF appears even further behind than its sister agency in thinking strategically about insuring that its work benefits the sexes in proportion to their needs. Country Director Bernard Bainvel told Refcoord June 16 that he wants to conduct a gender audit on some parts of UNICEF's program "at the end of the year." Bainvel, who arrived in Russia in September 2008, said he wants to introduce more of a gender dimension in UNICEF interventions. His agency needs to look at whether it is able to challenge stereotypes of men and women through its psycho-social program as well as whether women are comfortable talking about their unmet needs, he acknowledged. Fixed gender roles can harm boys as well as girls, Bainvel reflected further. For example, youth services are mostly used by young women; young Caucasian men do not show up because of their society's belief that they should not need help.

¶22. (U) Currently, close to 50 percent of UNICEF Russia's program is in the North Caucasus, where, Bainvel noted, there is a pronounced gender differentiation in parenting. Bainvel also remarked that the choice of when and with whom to get married, or of not to marry at all, is restricted for women in the North Caucasus, whether or not they are IDPs. He recalled the case of a woman on UNICEF's own North Caucasus staff whose father, because she was still single, would not allow her to move to Moscow for a job. On the positive side, Bainvel said UNICEF could successfully draw on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Russia has ratified, in order to escape the trap of perceived cultural relativism in its advice to Caucasian beneficiaries.

¶23. (U) Bainvel said he had no figures on how many UNICEF beneficiaries are IDPs and no way of collecting them. He also had no statistics on what percentages of UNICEF beneficiaries are boys and girls. The agency tries to keep a 50/50 balance, he reported, but does nothing systematic to ensure such equality. He explained that gender awareness is not a matter of counting the number of girls but of looking at the life cycle - family, streets, school, political participation - and identifying where there is bias.

¶24. (U) UNICEF in Russia does not have a mechanism for beneficiaries to complain about sexual harassment. Perhaps none is necessary in Moscow, Bainvel rationalized, as UNICEF supplies little direct assistance in the capital. Arguably the same is true in the North Caucasus, where the situation is not classified as an emergency, he added. Bainvel does believe that a complaints mechanism also protects the agency that promulgates it, however; he has therefore tabled with the UN Country Team the issue of introducing one.

Comment

¶25. (SBU) UN staff interviewed for this report came across as well disposed toward considering special gender-based protection needs; however, they had not undertaken systematic or original efforts to implement UNHCR Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women (ref C). Distractions created by Russia's peculiarly challenging operating environment - relatively small budgets; urban displaced populations; a host government ambivalent about meeting its responsibilities under international law - appear to be the main culprits in this lag. We will continue to raise the issue of women's special vulnerability with international organization duty-bearers and encourage official visitors to do the same.

BEYRLE